**DIVERSE MINDS**
LEARNING & LEISURE CIC

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS & CARERS

# After-school overwhelm

## Understanding difficult afternoons and making the journey home easier

### If you find yourself dreading pickup

You can love your child and still feel worn down by afternoons that end in tears, arguments or silence. What happens at home deserves to be understood, even when school sees a different picture.

This guide combines parents' reported experiences with practical ideas to explore together.

INSIDE

Making sense of the pattern | Getting home | Difficult moments
Asking school for help | A plan to complete together

UNDERSTANDING

# When the school day catches up

## A contrast parents have reported

In UK research, parents and professionals described girls with ADHD who appeared quiet at school but were more distressed or talkative at home. Some parents felt their concerns were missed because school saw fewer difficulties. Their accounts help explain why the whole day matters. [1]

### Distress can be loud

You may notice crying, shouting, arguments or a reaction that seems much bigger than the immediate problem.

### It can also be quiet

A young person may withdraw, stop talking or seem unable to manage the next ordinary task. Quiet distress deserves attention too. [4,5]

## Look at what the day has required

Noise, social demands, changes and sustained effort may all contribute. So may hunger, poor sleep, pain or something upsetting that happened. Some children hide difficulties, but that is not the only explanation. [3,4]

### You do not need the perfect label

After-school overwhelm describes an experience, not a diagnosis. Being distressed at home does not prove masking or a particular attachment pattern. Your child still deserves help, and your observations still matter.

COMING HOME

# Try a gentler arrival

Agree ideas when your child is settled. Use what fits their age and preferences; there is no fixed recovery time or routine that works for everyone. [3]

1

## At pickup

Offer a familiar greeting without needing an account of the day. If questions are difficult, save them for later. A child who is quiet may still want your company. [3,5]

2

## On the journey

If possible, keep the journey predictable and postpone non-essential stops. Ask whether talking, music or quiet feels best. In a vehicle, keep seatbelts on and stop safely before responding to anything that needs your attention.

3

## Once home

Offer a drink and familiar food if wanted. Allow comfortable clothes and a choice of rest, company or safe movement. Postpone homework and other non-urgent demands until they can manage them. [3,5]

**You do not have to make every afternoon perfect**

Work, siblings and travel can limit what is possible. Choose one change that might reduce pressure. If it does not help, that is useful information about the fit of the idea, not a failure by you or your child.

DIFFICULT MOMENTS

# When feelings spill over

## Make safety the first task

Move siblings away from danger and give everyone space. Remove nearby hazards if you can do so safely. Avoid trying to hold a distressed child still; get urgent help if there is a risk you cannot manage. [5,7]

## Say less for a while

Use a steady voice and short phrases, such as I am here or We can talk later. Avoid repeated questions, arguments or insisting on eye contact. Offer touch only if it is welcome. [4,5]

## Let recovery come before the discussion

When everyone is ready, you can return to what happened and any harm that needs repairing. Understanding distress does not mean anyone should be hurt. A calmer time makes it easier to work out a safer plan. [4]

## You may need to recover too

You do not have to be perfectly calm to be a caring parent. If you shout, acknowledge it and reconnect when you can. Ask a safe adult to take over if you need a break. Repeatedly feeling unsafe needs outside support. [2,4]

### Getting urgent help in Scotland

Phone 999 if anyone is in immediate danger. For urgent mental health concerns, contact the usual team or GP when available. NHS 24 on 111 can help when you cannot get urgent support from them. [7]

GETTING SUPPORT

# Trust what you are noticing

## School may see only part of the picture

Action for Children reports families feeling disbelieved when a child's difficulties were not visible at school. You do not need to wait until the same distress happens in a classroom before asking for help with what is happening at home. [2]

## Ask what can change during the day

Share a few examples and your child's account, where they want to contribute. Ask about breaks, lunch, busy transitions and access to a trusted adult. Agree one adjustment and a review date. A diagnosis is not required for additional support for learning in Scotland. [3,8]

## If the first conversation goes nowhere

Trust your gut enough to follow up when difficulties continue. Ask for a written response and what further support or review is possible. Enquire can explain next steps with Scottish schools. A friend or advocate can help you prepare or attend. [6]

### Words you can adapt

I am glad you are seeing them settled at school. At home, we are seeing [example], and recovery is taking [time or impact]. Could we look at what the day is asking of them and agree what support to try? I would like us to consider both accounts.

You do not have to keep a detailed diary to deserve help. A few notes can support a conversation. If things worsen, seek further health advice rather than waiting for the next school review. [4]

**COMPLETE TOGETHER**

# Our after-school plan

Write or draw together at a settled time. This is an invitation to share preferences, not a task the child has to complete.

Name or initials: _____ Date: _____

## At pickup and on the journey

How much talking feels comfortable? What could make the journey easier?

## When I get home

Food or drink, clothes, rest, movement or company: what would I choose?

## If things become too much

What could adults notice? What helps me, and what should they avoid?

## One change and who will help

What will we try? Who else needs to know? When will we review it?

**For the adults: one way I can get support or reduce pressure on myself**

Choose what to share with school. This is an original planning sheet, not an assessment. Review whether distress and effort reduce, rather than only whether the child becomes quieter.

FURTHER READING

# Sources and support

Information and links checked 29 October 2026. Numbers in the guide refer to these sources. Practical examples are suggestions to adapt, not a tested programme.

**1. Williams and colleagues, 2026**

UK focus groups with 16 parents/carers and 19 professionals; girls with ADHD.

Read the parent/carer research

**2. Action for Children: Parent Talk, 2025**

Family accounts, including feeling disbelieved (p.15). Not an ADHD-only study.

Read the family experiences report

**3. YoungMinds: transitions and change**

Parent guidance on recovery time and sensory demands.

Read the transitions guide

**4. YoungMinds: supporting difficult behaviour**

Parent guidance, family experiences and when to seek further help.

Read the parent guide

**5. Just One Norfolk NHS**

Advice on distress, getting home from school and recovery.

Read the NHS advice

**6. Enquire: solving problems with school**

Scottish advice on follow-up, meetings and advocacy.

Read the Scottish school advice

**7. NHS inform: urgent mental health help**

Current routes to urgent help for all ages in Scotland.

Find urgent support

**8. Enquire: additional support for learning**

Needs-led Scottish education support does not require a diagnosis.

Understand support for learning